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From Qandeel Baloch to Hina Javed: A Decade-Long Structural Reality of Femicide Pattern in Pakistan

Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) strongly condemns the horrific death of Hina Javed. She was found dead on 20 August 2026 at a flat in Rawalpindi. An FIR was registered the same day at the Civil Lines police station under sections 302 and 34 of the Pakistan Penal Code, 1860 ('PPC') on the complaint of her brother for her murder, naming her husband, her father-in-law, and a domestic worker. As per the FIR, her body was found in the bathroom of the apartment in a state that showed clear signs of torture and brutalization. Her hands were tied behind her back, her mouth was gagged with a piece of cloth, and a wire was fastened around her neck and tied to the bathroom shower rod. As per the news reports, the postmortem report revealed severe injuries, including a fractured neck bone, damage to her ribs, and an injury below her right lip. The same reports quoted the complainant, Hina's brother, as alleging that she might have been administered a poisonous substance before her death. Media reports further stated that Hina's husband and the domestic worker are currently in custody, with the domestic worker reportedly having given three different accounts regarding the circumstances of her death. The case is under investigation and trial to examine the exact cause of death and, if it is established to be a murder, then who was responsible.

While investigation and legal proceedings are currently underway and the cause of Hina's death has not yet been determined, DRF reserves comment on the proceedings themselves, so that the facts are not interfered with, and justice is delivered fairly. We do not pronounce on guilt as that is for a court to determine, after a trial, on evidence. Instead, we are asking a narrower and far harder question, the only one that has ever truly mattered in cases like this: *will this case survive a trial?*

Having worked since 2013 on digital rights, against gender-based violence, and for online freedoms, we have watched enough such cases over these years to fear that it will not. We have seen cases involving gender-based violence begin with public outrage and a demand for justice, only to collapse years later because evidence was not secured properly, witnesses were not protected, the chain of custody was not maintained, family pardoned the accused, or the prosecution could not prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt. Hina Javed was one of us, part of the same community whose safety and dignity we continue to fight for, and it is in that spirit that we raise this question at this very early stage of the case.

Here we would refer to Qandeel Baloch's murder in 2016 by her own brother, widely characterised as an "honour killing," which exposed how the law then permitted a family to

forgive a relative for killing one of their own. The state closed that door through the Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in the Name or Pretext of Honour) Act 2016, which was passed after public outrage over her case. However, it did not help deliver justice in her case. Despite her brother confessing to strangling her, the Lahore High Court acquitted him, citing that no honour motive was established, discarding the judicial confession for non-compliance with Supreme Court safeguards, and accepting the family's pardon.

Most recently, the Naila Rind case shows the same failure in delivering justice to a young student because of systemic gaps in the response. A final-year student at the University of Sindh, she was found dead in her hostel room in January 2017, following a phone-based blackmail campaign. In 2026, nearly a decade later, the Sindh High Court acquitted the accused not because her death was in doubt, but because insufficient proof made conviction legally impossible. The anti-terrorism offence, dissemination of photographs, and blackmail were all unproved, and the case was not proved beyond reasonable doubt. A conviction that should have rested on a phone and documentary evidence was undone by how that evidence was produced in court. Almost nine and a half years after her death, her case didn't fail on its facts; it failed on its file.

These patterns matter directly for Hina's case as well, where the cause of death is still not confirmed, and for any other case in Pakistan that may meet the same systemic response. Pakistan's medico-legal system routinely fails due to the absence of forensic experts in hospitals, disputed medico-legal reports, and pressure to alter findings. Police likewise lack specialised training in homicide and cybercrime investigation, as [86% of surveyed Karachi officers had no forensic training in three years, and one Rawalpindi investigator hadn't been retrained in a decade](#). These gaps cause delays that often prove fatal to prosecutions. In Hina's case, the post-mortem came roughly twelve hours after death, with samples now at the Punjab Forensic Science Agency; whether the case survives may depend entirely on those results and on whether the custody log holds.

In addition to the above, courts have also made the evidentiary cost of scene-handling failures explicit. In May 2026, [the Lahore High Court set aside a rape conviction](#), citing weak prosecution and mishandled forensic evidence as major reasons for Punjab's low conviction rate. In [Mohammad Ramzan v Khizar Hayat \(2024 SCMR 1085\)](#), the Supreme Court upheld an acquittal, holding that the investigating agency must confront the inherent flaws in its methodology and specialise its investigative function by separating it from ordinary police duties, because Article 10A of Pakistan's Constitution guarantees fair investigation and trial. Together, these rulings state one proposition: an unsecured scene and an undocumented chain of custody will not sustain a conviction, however grave the offence.

Measured against that standard, Hina Javed's case is exposed on two fronts: the crime scene and the digital record. She was killed inside a home, where the accused control the scene until police arrive, and in that window, the crime scene can be cleaned or altered. The FIR's timeline shows that window existed here, with her father-in-law calling her brother around 6:53 a.m., and he

reached by 7:23 a.m., and the FIR was registered only hours later. Police are now examining whether the scene was staged. If nothing was altered, that should emerge from a properly secured scene handled by trained investigation teams so the courts can reach a fair decision. The same standard applies to her phone and the three family phones now in custody. Whatever they hold as evidence for abuse and threats is worthless in court unless properly sealed, certified, and produced to the standard the Sindh High Court just restated in Naila Rind's case. Between an unsecured scene and a mishandled device, either gap alone is enough to damage a prosecution's case, as Naila Rind's case shows exactly how.

That said, we have observed over the years that in a system already accustomed to failing women, a mishandled record is not a technicality; it is a loophole. This pattern is documented and is not anecdotal. In November 2025, [Senator Sherry Rehman noted at a Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights session](#) that 70 percent of GBV incidents go unreported, and even among those reported, the national conviction rate hovers around five percent, falling to 0.5 percent in certain categories and just 1.3 percent for domestic violence. The [Human Rights Commission of Pakistan's State of Human Rights in 2025 report](#) puts scale to these numbers, as it recorded 470 women killed in honour-related violence, 1,332 domestic violence murders, and a 25 percent year-on-year rise in gender-based violence, with 60 percent of incidents occurring inside the victim's home.

These figures are not just alarming; they show how many cases start like this one, with a family demanding justice, go unanswered by the time a case reaches trial. Delay compounds the problem as [2.1 million cases are pending across Pakistan's courts, roughly 1.8 million of them in the district judiciary, as of January–June 2026](#), and judges are routinely transferred mid-evidence, stalling proceedings further. Together, these patterns point to a consistent set of concerns: the vulnerability of women in domestic settings, the slow pace of GBV adjudication, and the risk of cases losing momentum or evidentiary integrity by the time they reach trial.

We are therefore calling for the investigation and trial into Hina Javed's case to be handled with the utmost caution and legal integrity from the outset, even when the public's attention has moved on. All gaps named may be those the courts in Pakistan have already cited in judgments as the reason a case collapsed. We name them now, while the investigation is live and they can still be fixed, and we demand they be closed permanently for every woman killed after her.

On this case, now:

1. Prosecution should actively pursue this case on behalf of the State, alongside the family's complaint, so no future settlement between the two households can extinguish it.
2. The FIR currently cites only PPC Sections 302 and 34. Given the possibility of a staged scene, Section 201 should be considered, and the poisoning allegation should be forensically investigated, with the relevant provision invoked if evidence supports it.
3. An independent medico-legal board should check the cause and manner of death with a documented chain of custody and a fixed reporting deadline
4. Hina's phone and her family's phones should be properly forensically secured, with any digital evidence certified to evidentiary standard before trial.

5. Section 164 CrPC statements should be recorded in strict compliance with judicial directions and legal principles,
6. Prior records of abuse should be properly recorded and investigated,
7. Hina's parents and brother should be protected from any pressure to compound the case. Any such approach and pressure must be investigated and prosecuted.
8. The trial should proceed day-to-day so justice is not delayed for years.

On the law, permanently:

9. Section 311 PPC mandates life imprisonment for honour-related killings even where qisas is waived, yet comparable killings by intimate partners or household members carry no equivalent mandatory punishment unless an "honour" motive is established. The law should be amended to mandate tazir punishment for intentional domestic killings involving gender-based or domestic violence as well.
10. A statutory first-response protocol should maintain immediate securing and sealing of the scene in suspicious deaths of women in domestic settings, with disciplinary consequences for failure and non-compliance
11. Forensic and medico-legal capacity should be strengthened through properly equipped forensic departments in hospitals, accredited laboratories, documented chain-of-custody procedures, time-bound reporting, and trained women medico-legal officers in every district.
12. Femicide trials should be time-bound with day-to-day hearings, adjournments granted only for written reasons with costs, continuity of the presiding judge, and properly functioning gender-based violence courts with trained prosecutors in every district.

On ourselves:

13. We commit that we will not describe the killing of a woman by her husband or family as a "domestic dispute," a "family matter," or a tragedy of passion, as it is a homicide, and we will report it as one. We will not report a victim's conduct, appearance, marriage, or history as though it were relevant to her death
14. We will not stop at the arrest, and we will follow these cases to the verdict to demand justice and a fair outcome. Naila Rind's acquittal came nine and a half years after her death, with almost no coverage at all.

Without prejudging the outcome of this case, DRF calls on the relevant authorities to ensure the above is upheld through proper transparency, accountability, and full protection of the family's right to information throughout the case, in accordance with the law. Hina Javed's family, including families of victims of femicide, and the public that continues to watch these cases long after the news cycle moves on, deserve an investigative and judicial process built to withstand scrutiny, not one that merely survives it.

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